CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for forwarding data packets to one of a plurality of servers comprising:
receiving a data packet from a source at a data packet forwarding device having a plurality of ports;
performing a hashing function using a unique component of the data packet as a seed value for the hash;
generating a hash value using the hashing function;
looking up a table for address information of one of the plurality of servers using the hashed value as an index to the table; and
forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein forwarding the data packet to a server corresponding to the address comprises forwarding subsequent data packets from the source to the server using the hashing function.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein generating a hash value using the hashing function comprises generating a hash value using at least one parameter from a group consisting of a Transmission Control Protocol source port number, Transmission Control

Protocol destination port number, an Internet Protocol (hereafter IP) source address and an IP destination address in the hash function.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table comprises searching a table for the address information of the server using the hash value generated by the hashing function and forwarding the data packet to the server.

5. An article of manufacture comprising:

a machine-accessible medium including instructions, that when executed by a machine, cause said machine to perform operations comprising

receiving a data packet from a source at a data packet forwarding device having a plurality of ports;

performing a hashing function using a unique component of the data packet as a seed value for the hash;

generating a hash value using the hashing function;

looking up a table for address information of one of the plurality of servers using the hashed value as an index to the table; and

forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table.

6. The article of manufacture of claim 5, wherein said machine-accessible medium further includes instructions that when executed by the machine, cause the machine to send subsequent data packets from the source to the server using the hash function.

7. The article of manufacture of claim 5, wherein said machine-accessible medium further includes instructions that when executed by the machine, cause the machine to generate a hash value using at least one parameter from a group consisting of a Transmission Control Protocol source port number, Transmission Control Protocol destination port number, an Internet Protocol (hereafter IP) source address and an IP destination address in the hashing function.

8. The article of manufacture of claim 5, wherein said instructions for forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table, includes further instructions to cause the machine to search the table for the address information of the server using the hashed value generated by the hashing function and to forward the data packet to the server.

9. An apparatus comprising:

means for receiving a data packet from a source at a data packet forwarding device having a plurality of ports;

means for performing a hashing function using a unique component of the data packet as a seed value for the hash;

means for generating a hash value using the hashing function;

means for looking up a table for address information of one of the plurality of servers using the hashed value as an index to the table; and

means for forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table.

10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein means for forwarding the data packet to a server corresponding to the address comprises means for forwarding subsequent data packets from the source to the server using the hashing function.

11. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein means for generating a hash value using the hashing function comprises means for generating a hash value using at least one parameter from a group consisting of a Transmission Control Protocol source port number, Transmission Control Protocol destination port number, an Internet Protocol (hereafter IP) source address and an IP destination address in the hash function.

12. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein means for forwarding the data packet to a server using the address information obtained from the table comprises means for searching a table for the address information of the server using the hash value generated by the hashing function and forwarding the data packet to the server.